

MARXISM AND INDIAN ACADEMICS

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Marxism, though of western origin, has had influential presence both in politics and academia of India. In independent India, communist leaders were not as successful in influencing people as the communist and leftist academics. The reason was a combination of factors. First, the very first Prime Minister of the new Indian republic was an admirer of socialism and soviet model of planning for economic development. Secondly, Indo-Soviet close strategic relationship since the mid-fifties of the last century gave Marxist and fellow travelers in the academia undue influence and clout. The policy was to appoint “*progressives*” in high positions of policy making academic institutions and scorn “*reactionaries*” howsoever reputed scholars they might be. This Marxist influence and encounter divided the academic world and their continued domination and partisanship through the long regime of the Congress Party destroyed the environment for true academic excellence in the humanities and academics.

This initial circumstance made the work of the leftist propagandists rather easy in independent India. This is how all kind of ex-communist activists and fellow travelers became instantly professors, chairmen of committees and commissions, vice-chancellors, even ministers in the Union Cabinet. Their academic agenda favoured certain approach over scholarship and were tireless in their effort to denigrate Indian civilization and culture. A civilization predominantly Hindu but denied vehemently and called instead secular, multicultural, diverse etc.

The encounter between the Hindu way of thought and a Marxist-ideology has been very difficult to comprehend. On the political side the communist stratagem to win the common masses failed. But paradoxically, the educated, upper and middle class intellectuals were largely won over by the ‘progressive’ talks preached and propagated by the official and other media. Thus we

see the spectacle that the common man of India does not care about the declarations of the progressives, but the intellectual does. In fact, the left wing pretensions still rule the highest circles of media and academia. For the last four decades it has been accomplished by a handful of leftist professors, mostly the 'eminent historians' who authoritatively preach on all subjects of state and social policy, including foreign policy.

The Marxist writers, especially the historians, endeavoured to fit available facts, personae, characters, events and descriptions into a preconceived frame. On this basis, it was claimed that the analysis or propositions presented by them is 'scientific' and basically different from others. Yet we did not get any glimpse of the life of the common people in the writings of any Marxist historian. Instead it is the traditional Marxist jargons superimposed over the known facts of history. Leave alone the ancient or mediaeval history, even a contemporary period or subject treated by the Marxist historians does not include the picture of people's life even in a town or a village, nothing to say of the whole country. Besides, they also systematically ran down and denigrated those scholars who did not agree to their interpretations of history or events in the name of liberalism, secularism, being progressive etc.

The well known Marxist historian Romila Thapar once claimed 'to re-create the picture of common life in ancient times' with the help of 'archeological sources' could only write more and more about a Mahmud Gaznavi, emperor Asoka or Shakuntala in the end and not at all about any ordinary soldier or a monk or a farmer. The common men could not find a discernible place, despite rhetoric, in the Marxist history writings. Leaving aside the remote history, even the modern times descriptions for which much more material are available, the Marxist historians have written books or articles full of references

to leaders like Nehru-Gandhi-Jinnah, Congress Party, and such leaders, their speeches, tactics, mistakes etc. only.

Secondly, they specialized in changing names of widely accepted classifications of history and thus pretending to have given something new. The Marxists believe it to be their great contribution that they have renamed the earlier division of Indian history viz. Hindu, Muslim and British periods as the ancient, mediaeval and modern respectively. The Centre for Historical Studies of the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) which stationed most of the leftist academics claims this renaming as its greatest achievement! They have nothing else to point out by way of any new path-breaking historical research. In this kind of “*scientific history-writing*” the medieval Turkish invaders were renamed as ‘*Turkish ruling class*’ and Mahmud Gaznavi was called a ‘*brave warrior*’. The Mongol/Mughal invader Babar was referred to as ‘*India’s ruler*’ and accordingly the entire banal descriptions, apart from blacking out many unpleasant details, was rewritten with new nouns and pronouns.

Marxist influenced scholarship’s biggest handicap is that it is circumscribed by its preconceived agenda and notions and consequent inability to study and judge history, society and events in perspective and with non-partisan objectivity. Allied with this is mindset of intolerance and an inability to enter scholarly debate and dialogue with those it does not agree with, resort to rhetoric, giving labels and epithets and generalisations are resorted to instead of scholarly assertions and rebuttals. However, what is really tragic is that this leftist scholarship and its proponents have for the most part of last sixty years occupied positions of power and influence and have reduced the scholarship in humanities to mediocrity and divided academia into camps and “caste” groups.

It was this kind of approach, which transformed scholarship into pamphleteering and professors into political propagandists and activists. With reference to Islam and Communism the Indian Marxists become pleaders instead of scholars or authors. Having a glimpse of what was to come, as hinted by the Marxist historians in 1964-65 itself, R.C. Majumdar had rightly stated that instead of teaching such kind of history it would be better to remove the subject itself from the curriculum. But unfortunately the same kind was taught all over the country due to official patronage. A history full of prejudices, holes and concealments was declared most suitable and flaunted as being in line with our 'national secular state policy'. Though it was against the supreme motto *Satyamev Jayate* engraved on our national emblem. Thus in the name of 'scientific' or 'secular' writings; the Marxist writings reveled in different kinds of standards employed, concealments, arbitrary conclusions and logic long on rhetoric and short on facts.

In history writing the Indian Marxists (especially Romila Thapar, Bipan Chandra etc) first claimed that the 'real' history of any society should study above all the 'relations of production', 'productive forces', 'class-struggle', 'class acts' and the entire socio-economic realities. Their stance was that, heretofore, only the descriptions of royal dynasties constituted history books. The Marxists claimed to now write history of the 'people', the classes and the life of the society at large. Four decades have lapsed since that claim made, and we remain where we were. Let alone the history of common people in the ancient or mediaeval India, even the history of one single village or town has not come forth. Instead of real descriptions and understandable categories we got some jargons, arbitrary formulations, questions with no scope of getting ever any answers. This in the sum is the outcome which

the Marxists proudly call their ‘new’, ‘scientific’ or now ‘secular’ history.

Has any Marxist historian written about the labourers who worked on the tomb now called Taj Mahal? Come to the contemporary period. Can we get details about five generations of even noted personalities like Jawaharlal Nehru or Mohammad Ali Jinnah? If it is not possible to find satisfactory answers for these contemporary questions, is it not mere rhetoric to claim ‘reconstruction of the life of people in the ancient India’? Even basic questions from the social (Marxist) framework do not find answers in the books by Marxist historians. To wit, what classes existed in Sindh or Magadha in the sixth-seventh centuries engaged in some class-struggle? What forms class-struggle acquired in different parts of the country in the nineteenth century? Was there a main class struggle all over India or were there regional class-struggles of different kinds? In what forms the anxiety for defense manifested in societies of northern and western India in the wake of foreign Islamic invasions from seventh century onwards? How and when did the custom of untouchability began in India? If after turning the pages of books by Marxist historians we cannot find answers to these general questions, what is the worth of the claim to have written some new and social history? If we cannot get details even about a single day in the lives of even the emperors lived centuries ago how futile it is to talk about knowing what the ‘elephant-keepers’ and ‘chariot drivers’ of those days thought of state policies!

This kind of Marxist thought process is selective. The courtesy shown to the medieval invaders was not extended to non-Islamic figures such as the historical greats like Guru Govind Singh, Shivaji, or to the contemporary historians such as R C Majumdar or scholars like S R Goel. There is an apparent effort to rationalise the deeds of the aggressors, who invaded and looted

India for centuries and made “*the bloodiest story in history*”? On the other hand choice of phrases the Marxists use to refer to Hindu historical figures and organizations as ‘communal’ or ‘communal-fascist’ while even the fanatic, violent and notorious terrorist Islamic organizations are called by them as ‘orthodox’, ‘conservative’ or at the most ‘militant’. They never use the expression ‘communal-fascist’ for any Muslim organization or leader even when an Islamic leader or organization openly declare its goal to ‘make India Islamic again’. Their semantic skills and selective attacks only make pursuit of true research and scholarship a difficult task. This kind of constant use of adjectives or pejoratives for one’s favourites and opponents has its own use. In Russia Vladimir Lenin used the technique with great effect and emerged successful even though he never enjoyed majority in the Russian communist party for his theses.

In India also we find frequent use of pairs of adjectives like ‘reactionary’ and ‘progressive’ ‘communal’ and ‘scientific’, ‘communal’ and ‘secular’. Curiously, it is the leftist writers who are keen on projecting religious identification in every matter and keep especially the Muslims separate from the broad generic term ‘people’ under one pretext or the other. Consequently, one can observe the queer situation that those referring to ‘Muslim feelings’, ‘Muslim concerns’ and ‘Muslim votes’ in articles, speeches or analyses are called secular. While those asking for equal, common denominator in public policy and discourse are branded as communal, the Hindu communal. Thus it is also commonplace for the Marxist writers to add negative adjectives to those holding differing views, without pointing out any shortcomings in others writings. The Marxists in India have never been able to counter the propositions, descriptions and arguments of non-Marxist scholars with alternative arguments, facts or descriptions. The rejection is always primarily based on using

epithets such as ‘communal’, ‘anti-Muslim’, ‘imperialist’, ‘cut off from society’, ‘writing for Birlas’, ‘appointed by the Sangh Parivar’, ‘eccentric’, ‘ignorant’ etc. A most glaring example is the total suppression of the entire research and documentation done by Solzhenitsyn in Russia and, at a lesser scale, Sita Ram Goel in India. Looking at the experience of decades both in India and abroad it can be fairly concluded that without this semantic cunning the Marxist writers cannot convince perhaps even themselves, let alone readers. In all this non-partisan informed debate on vital issues becomes the first casualty and rhetoric and labels replace scholarship.

Marxist influenced writing of history in India tends to be vague. Well-known events, rulers and descriptions become faceless, not to be identified. Retired JNU professor Harbans Mukhia generally used the word ‘state’ while writing about the Muslim period. He writes on very important topics like conversions to Islam, jazia tax, composite culture etc. without clarifying which particular regime he is talking about in the long period from the eleventh to eighteenth centuries? He deliberately did it, to make it impossible for a student to examine, verify or appreciate the character of any particular regime or to fix a ruler’s responsibility with reference to any particular event. For the most part the forms and identities simply vanish.

Another technique of the Marxists is to prefer generic nouns over particular, individual ones. This too prevents identification of any historical ruler or event to appreciate. Say, for instance, the founding and characteristics of the much-hyped ‘composite culture’. Any examining requires concrete description, clear facts, names, places, time, figures, witnesses, etc. Without these the history writing resembles the countless books on history written, printed and publicized for decades by the Soviet academies. In the years during Leonid Brezhnev, the historical descriptions

were full of 'the Party did this', 'traitors did that', 'revisionists were defeated', 'enemies of the people were eliminated', 'working class movement is progressing all over the world', 'reactionary forces are on retreat' and so on. This constituted the standard presentation on history, politics and sociological writings emanating from the highest circles of the Soviet scholars. With little adjustments to style and method our leftist writers too have been largely parading a continuous procession of proclamations, ready-made conclusions, prejudices, without a backing of concrete mentions of names, dates, events and adequate data, references, details or figures. Semantics and generalizations dominate concrete facts and evidence.

One of the specialties of our Marxist historians is the presence of those very shortcomings in their writings, which they point out in others. Harbans Mukhia wrote that communal and nationalist historians deliberately suppressed / ignored certain facts and highlighted certain others because they studied not the society but the rulers only. But Mukhia himself suppressed and concealed facts while dealing with jazia and forcible conversions during the Islamic rule in India. Likewise, Marxist historians generally advise others about a 'method' in history writing but it has never become clear what their own method is? They even do not state clearly whether they follow the Marxist method or not. Hence their general character resembles that of S. Gopal, as described by Raj Thapar, i.e. *"to state or write in such an ambiguous style or to strike such a posture as will permit a changed version later according to the convenience of time and situation."*

Marxist historians claim superiority over other historians in the following order. Historical evidence! method of history! commitment to social change. They generally start debating with reference to historical facts. But when cornered or put in an untenable position on facts, they start discussing some incompre-

hensible ‘method’ of study, which possibly only they understand, as Harbans Mukhia did when caught on facts by Prof. A R Khan on the pamphlet *The political Abuse of history* (1989) written jointly by a number of Marxist historians on the Ayodhya issue (other Marxist historians just kept quiet). In this fashion, Marxist historians when cornered change track, all the while keeping a safe distance from the main contention, and finally take shelter behind their grandiose claim of being the supporter of some social revolution / progressive change / people-oriented policies etc. and thus seek justification of some vague “superior” cause, implying others are opposed to such causes.

The leftist and liberal scholarship in India had no interest in an open and balanced exchange of ideas with others. In fact they carefully avoid it. Even when forced by circumstances, as happened when the Chandra Shekhar government brought the two sides for resolving the Ayodhya dispute, to sit and discuss with other historians point by point, evidence by evidence, they used all tricks to jeopardize the effort. The leftist writers seem more interested in imposing dogmas on others, ideological-political conversion being the main objective. Hence we find that Marxist historians never paid any attention to the hard facts or sound arguments presented by other historians. As seen in the first documented debate, organized by the *Seminar* in 1962, then renowned scholars R. C. Muzumdar, K. M. Panikkar and K. A. Nilakanta Sastri had presented serious and most valuable thoughts about the studies of history. But the Marxist eminents did not seem to have paid any attention to it. This attitude remains with them till today.

On the other hand, in non-Marxist scholarship there is no example of deliberately omitting any available evidence or information. It is a different matter when a fact had not come to light at the time of writing or the author was not aware of it. But

only in Marxist writings one can observe countless examples where references to known research works, facts and data connected with the very subject under consideration are completely omitted. The most conspicuous example is the exclusion of Sita Ram Goel's works as also his well-researched compilation, while discussing 'destruction of temples' in Indian history. True scholarship demands rebuttals and debate on facts and perspective and not labels.

This is all the more serious because Marxist historians had been hurling this charge on the earlier historians, that is, 'repeating events selected in advance', 'not verifying the basis for selection', 'absence of relevance' and 'lack of historical discipline'. But the Marxists have been flaunting beef-eating in ancient India, at random, with no systematic study of any aspect of life of any period in Indian history. Just by displaying a stray incident or a saying or out of context source, and persisting with a meager, faulty exhibit for decades! By quoting a single example, that too concealing its full form, they proclaimed 'a temple-breaking *tradition* of Hindu kings' based on a single instance to contextualise temple-destructions excesses in India during the Muslim rule. They have transgressed the very 'historical discipline' which they were finding fault with others. In the process they failed to avoid not only facts of history but, also failed to put in historical perspective the Muslim rule in India. Their anxiety to sustain a liberal and secular discourse on Muslim rule in India is unfair both to history and Muslim rule itself. Their actions are sought to be glossed over or justified in to-days context and not in their period. That they behaved as all the conquerors do or did then – is a very valid position to judge the Muslim rule in India in an objective manner and perspective. Even if some of the grievances of Hindu community are justified – so be it. Its part of the past and not today. Yet a leftist and

“*secular*” mind cannot comprehend even a minor deviation on part of Muslim rulers, even if warranted by compelling facts.

It has been repeatedly observed and in different contexts that the Indian Marxists do not follow what they demand from others. Not only from scholars but all those who question their propositions. In all such actions only one feeling determines their attitude. They betray an animus towards Indian civilization, especially the Hindu civilization. Which is why, to them, any inconvenient event or fact (for instance, destruction of the Somnath temple by Gaznavi in the past or Islamic terrorism at present) has to be ‘understood’, not criticized. According to their pet logic, such things must be seen in ‘perspective’ or in its ‘historical setting’ etc. But when the Marxists launch criticism on anything or anyone the perspective or setting vanishes.

A common student or reader would hardly investigate into the labyrinth of claims and accusations made by the eminent Marxists. A newspaper reader after some time presumes that what has been repeatedly said by the ‘big’ professors must be true after all. But if anybody goes to check and verify, as one Y C Rosser did once on the issue of ‘Hindus also destroyed temples frequently’, it becomes pretty clear that the Marxist professors had nothing more than conjectures and guess work apparently based on stray coins, rock-edicts, one or two sentences – selected arbitrarily and giving their own meaning, out of context – from some compositions or old literature. That is practically all by way of presenting a ‘new history’. A history student of a college or university would not even think of probing critically because he has to repeat the very formulations and dogmas to get marks in examinations and interviews. Even junior professors working under senior Marxist professors dare not question the propositions for the real fear that it may block their own chances of promotions, publications recommendations, fellowships etc. This

is the experience of at least one professor working at the Centre for Historical Study at the JNU. He told this author that he began his scholarly career as a disciple of a most eminent Marxist historian there. But later when he made attempt to present his own, though Marxist, view it cost him refusal by a publisher of publishing his already accepted book, under the influence of the said eminent. So the line is fixed, and repeating it is the only scholarly writing. Such tradition has been the basic feature of the Marxist history writing in India.

If we compare old and new Marxist articles on Islam, Communalism or Hinduism we find the same facts and arguments repeated n-times over. If some old arguments or propositions have lost their apparent worth the Marxist historians quietly omit them in their new books or new editions and never discuss what happened to the earlier claims? Whether they have given them up or altered it? A good example can be seen in Romila Thapar's *A History of India* (1966) and its revised version *Early India* (2003). According to a serving history professor of the JNU, a large portion of the earlier part of the original book has been silently removed, without a word of explanation or reference about them.

Of the much-propagated Marxist claim that 'Hindus also destroyed temples' the leftist historians had been misleading people for nearly four long decades. When confronted by a serious American student, Rosser, about the amount of study and evidence collected on the subject, *every* Marxist eminent scurried for cover behind others. Saying 'I have not studied much, but the other one has' and they went on passing the buck. Harbans Mukhia named Romila Thapar and she named some American, who in his turn was himself quoting another obscure American.... That was all about the study done on a topic the very Marxist eminents have been speaking loudly for more than three decades!

This is the most symbolic trait of the Marxist scholarship in this country.

On communalism the Marxists are themselves confused in giving a theoretical understanding. They could not give even a formal meaning of the term they have most used and abused. Was it impossible to define what they called 'communalism'? It was not. But their real aim was not to understand and solve the problem but to create an anti-Hindu stratagem. It resulted in disorder. The Marxists had to twist and turn at every step so as to bring in their ideological frame their only enemy: the 'Hindu communalists'. Hence in their descriptions of communalism we find, on the one hand, silence on the original, Islamic side even to the extent of ignoring what innumerable Muslim scholars, narrators and chroniclers have recorded; and, on the other hand, generalised condemnations about Hinduism, Brahminism and inconvenient nationalists. To justify this attitude, the Marxists analyses use two separate standards for 'communal' and 'Marxist' historians. When any serious student begins examining the writings of the Marxist historians he notices very early that the so-called communalism is no problem at all in itself but a manifestation of some other problem. In fact, original Islamic books and a small study by Prof Mushir-ul-Haque entitled *Islam in Secular India* (Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Studies, 1977) throws more light on the subject, while countless speeches, books and articles written by Bipan Chandra, Harbans Mukhia and Romila Thapar for decades do not make anything clear. This attitude had the unfortunate fallout of conveying an impression that liberal and secular India is anti Hindu.

In the matter of political practice, as in writings, on the issue of communalism, the role of the Marxists has been, to confuse and avoid discussion. They always insist on thrusting the entire responsibility for communalism on Hindus by all means. They

never criticize Islamic terrorist organisations but regularly complain about Hindu leaders, organizations like RSS, Bajrang Dal etc. It was a sure recipe for causing social division and bitterness. The partial approach of the Marxist historians on the Ayodhya issue demonstrated that their interest lies not in settling 'communal' problems but in giving them an anti-Hindu direction.

The Indian Marxist historians chose to describe Islamic aggression in the twelfth century as the "*arrival of brave warriors*" or "*Turk warriors*" (Harbans Mukhia). In the similar vein they do not blame Islamic separatism for the partition of India in the twentieth century. All their 'scientific' analyses suggest that, one way or the other, basically "Hindu" nationalists from Tilak to Gandhi were at fault for what went wrong.

The Marxists do not present a single document to let us see what were the *arguments* of the Muslim leaders demanding Pakistan. All actual arguments and records are glossed over and instead the Marxist thrust their own, self-conceived, contrived arguments to suggest that being in minority the Muslims felt unsafe. The meaning also being that Muslims would feel at ease only when they are in majority. Then what can this mean for the safety of other communities? And is this proposition true in the light of post-independence experience of minorities in India. In the name of protecting minorities interests; the leftist are only deepening the social divide by their unabashed anti-Hindu rhetoric. They seem to be more interested in polemics rather than serving the higher social purpose of uniting the communities.

It is the Indian nature or perhaps our indifference or the misplaced generosity of the nationalist scholars that the Marxist / leftist academics have been exercising academic authority for such a long time. It is well-known that non-communist political parties and organizations do not take much interest in ideological

and academic matters. Their priorities are generally oriented to electoral and power politics. Hence they did not question from the beginning the falsification of social sciences text books even after knowing what was afoot. This lack of resistance, in the form of a persistent effort, is now projected by the Marxists as their 'acceptance' by the country. Fortunately this country was never under the spell of Marxist dictatorship like in the Soviet Union or China. Hence newspapers and journals covering old debates are still available in libraries for anyone to see. Marxist viewpoint was never 'accepted' but effectively challenged whenever discussions took place fairly. But high positions in academies and political patronage have enabled them to maintain their academic rule. Without the support of state patronage the dominance of Marxist writings could not have been established. The Marxists are always vulnerable on facts and in any honest debate. Their entire claim is based on 'higher cause', 'scientific method' and 'social responsibility' proclaimed by themselves. Hence whenever they are cornered on facts they always take shelter behind some 'higher cause' or purpose.